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SUBJECT: OSCE/PERMANENT COUNCIL: STATEMENT ON BELARUS

¶1. (U) Post is authorized to present the following statement at the Permanent Council meeting in Vienna on January 22.

Begin text:

Madam Chairwoman,

At the Permanent Council meeting on December 18, 2008, the United States made a statement regretting that the government of Belarus had, on December 9, sentenced a human rights defender, Alyaksandr Barazenko, to one year of restricted freedom for participating in an entrepreneurs rally in January of 2008. Following our statement, the distinguished permanent representative of Belarus, Ambassador Sychov, claimed that our reports were incorrect, and that Mr. Barazenko had been released without being sentenced. He then suggested that we be more careful in our fact checking.

Madam Chairwoman, we went back and checked and can verify that in fact, Mr. Barazenko was convicted and sentenced to one year of restricted freedom to be served at home. Mr. Barazenko appealed this sentence and his appeal was dismissed by the Minsk Central District Court on January 13. The fact of this sentence was also confirmed in the December 22, 2008 activity report of the OSCE Office in Minsk which was distributed under document number SEC.FR/782/08.

We stand by our original statement of December 18 and continue to call on the government of Belarus to honor its international obligations and commitments to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens, and to promote democracy in Belarus.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.
CLINTON